

Raider Brigade Families and Friends: it's been awhile since my last update on how things are going over here in Iraq. What follows is my assessment on how things are going – and some feedback on how your Soldier is doing from my perspective.

The Raider Brigade Combat Team has settled into a steady battle rhythm (finally) after the first eight months of my command. Since last June, the pace has been incredibly busy: Task Force training at Fort Hood in July and August; a deployment to the National Training Center in September; pre-deployment preparations in October; deployment of our equipment in November while simultaneously closing out barracks, motorpools and headquarters; deployment to and training in Kuwait in December; and deployment to and relief in place of 3rd Brigade, 1st Armored Division in January. Believe it or not, the challenging pace here in Iraq right now seems a little more bearable when I look back on what we've done to date. Like most things in life, the anticipation of doing something is often not as bad actually doing it. That's what most every Soldier has found out about operations here in Iraq. The worries about a pending separation from loved ones, the long days preparing to go, the uncertainty of what things will be like once there all add up to increased anxiety – most all of it unfounded in my opinion.

Things here in Iraq continue to be incredibly complex. I don't get a chance to watch much news, but the glimpses I do get seem to be more pessimistic than what I am seeing on the ground. I admit to only being able to gauge a relatively small part of Iraq – but it is a very diverse area (a mix of Sunni and Shia') that may be representative of how things are going in other parts of this country. There has been a surge in sectarian violence over the last month relative to previous months. However, it seems to be small, covert, low level violence rather than large, overt, well-coordinated operations by one sect or the other. The civil war question is a hard one. I don't see it – but I think over here anyone can see what they wish to – and perhaps the optimist in me doesn't want to see it. But the facts are that Sunni and Shia continue to live together across the area I am responsible for in relative harmony; the Iraqi Security Forces (the Army and the police) continue to improve; and the Council of Representatives was recently seated. Civil war certainly remains a possibility – but I think all are hoping the selection of the key leadership through the established constitutional process and the seating of the government will be another stake in the heart of the insurgency and step farther away from civil war.

While the future of Iraq continues to be argued by all, what is unarguable in my eyes is how your Soldier is performing over here. I see the Soldiers every day making a meaningful contribution as a part of a great team. The 4th Support Battalion continues to provide outstanding logistical support to the entire brigade – while also operating the detention facility and providing combat escort for myriad operations. 1-22 Infantry continues to make a difference south of Baghdad as a part of 2nd Brigade, 101st Airborne Division. I talk to LTC Craig Osborne periodically – he is very proud of how the Regulars are doing. 4-42 FA has begun providing artillery delivered illumination in support of operations – so they are happy! They also have assumed responsibility for some battlespace from 1st Special Troops Battalion. Their primary task remains securing our forward operating base – and no one could be doing a better job than the Straight

Arrows. 7-10 Cav is operating day and night over about 250 square miles of Iraq. They have established a strong relationship with 2nd Bde, 9th IA Division. I see the troopers of 7-10 Cav on patrol every day – working hand in hand with the Iraqi Army. 1st Special Troops Battalion continues to provide the brigade with a diverse set of capabilities: military police; chemical recon; command posts; military intelligence; signal connectivity; unmanned aerial vehicles and other unique support. Finally, 1-66 continues to make a big difference in some of the toughest places to operate in Iraq. Like 7-10 – I see the Iron Knights operating day and night with their Iraqi partnered unit improving the security situation.

We have begun our leave program. Every Soldier that deployed into Iraq prior to 31 January will be afforded the opportunity for a two week leave (known as EML). I hope you and your Soldier have a great time together during this leave period. I ask that you apply some common sense. The division has lost a Soldier on EML to an auto accident. Apply all the measures that ensure you have a great time on leave and stay safe: wear your seatbelts; slow down; don't mix alcohol and driving, etc. Losing Soldiers at this point in the fight cannot be replaced.

As far as what will happen in the future...I think we will all know something soon. There is nothing to the rumor that we are coming home earlier than expected. (I heard that rumor from a Soldier in 4th SB today!) The planned deployment is still a year long. Stop Loss will be lifted after our return + 90 days. For planning purposes, I believe that will be sometime in early March of 2007. This is when Soldiers will be able to PCS to other locations, go to school, ETS, etc. Of course, this is all subject to change. I promise to inform you through the Rear Detachment Commander once the situation is locked in.

That's about what I know for right now. The Soldiers and I over here appreciate what you are doing back at Fort Hood. Frankly, I wouldn't trade places with my wife, Liz. I don't know how she does it – manages the finances, takes part in brigade and division level family readiness group activities, sends me stuff I need over here, keeps in touch with our parents, cuts the grass, walks the dog, and – most importantly – continues to raise our three boys. When I think about what I do compared to Liz – my job as brigade commander here in Iraq seems easy! I know that you are doing the same on your end. It takes a special person to be an Army spouse. I appreciate the sacrifice and commitment you are making right now.

OK – back to work for me. I hope all is well on your end. Thank you for what you are doing for your country.

Colonel Jim Pasquarette
Raider 6



TAJI, Iraq -- Pfc. Billy Flores, the number one man in the crew of the howitzer from 2nd Platoon, Battery B, 4th Battalion, 42nd Field Artillery Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, prepares to screw the fuse on the artillery round before firing the next mission, March 1. Flores hails from San Bernardino, Calif. and does the loading of the artillery rounds into the breech of the howitzer and pulls the lanyard to fire the rounds. (U.S. Army photo by Maj. David Olson, 1st BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.)



TAJI, Iraq – Iraqi army Lt. Col. Abdul Wasi Mohammed, the operations officer for 1st Mechanized Battalion, 1st Mechanized Brigade, 9th Iraqi Army Division, stands with Capt. Lou Castillo, commander of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Special Troops Battalion and Lt. Col. John Cross, battalion commander for 1st STB as they conduct a combined patrol together near Taji, March 16. (U.S. Army photo courtesy of 1STB.)



TAJI, Iraq -- U.S. Army majors Doug Watkins, the judge advocate general; Buddy Frick, the fire effects coordinator; Eldon Lacer, the brigade aviation officer; and Jim Bellotte, the intelligence officer; from the 1st Brigade Combat Team staff of the 4th Infantry Division conduct an orders rehearsal at Camp Taji, March 15. (U.S. Army photo by Maj. David Olson, 1st BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.)



TAJI, Iraq -- U.S. Army Maj. Pete Dargle, plans officer for 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, interfaces with an Iraqi Army Lt. col. from the 9th Iraqi Army Div. during their staff visit to the Raider Bde. Tactical Operations Center, March 1. (U.S. Army photo by Maj. David Olson, 1st BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.)



TAJI, Iraq -- Capt. Jake Wamsley, company commander, and Sgt. 1st Class Timothy Gray, platoon sgt., both of Company C, 1st Battalion, 66th Armor Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division discuss maintenance issues in the motor pool at Camp Taji, Feb. 2. (U.S. Army photo by Maj. David Olson, 1st BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.)



TAJI, Iraq – Staff Sgt. Dave Fitzgerald performs perimeter security during a reconnaissance patrol by 1st Battalion, 66th Armor Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division in an area where a recent insurgent attack took place on an Iraqi oil pipeline near Taji, March 1. The 1st Bn., 66th AR came to establish their presence and explore the area before the burning pipeline could be fixed. (U.S. Navy photo by Photographer's Mate 1st Class Michael Larson, COMCAM, 1st BCT, 4th Inf. Div.)



TAJI, Iraq -- The March awardees stand during the Raider Brigade award ceremony on Camp Taji, March 18. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Brent Hunt, 1st BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.)